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Marcia Gentry

Gifted Child Quarterly 2009 53: 262

DOI: 10.1177/0016986209346937

The online version of this article can be found at:

<http://gcq.sagepub.com/content/53/4/262>

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Myth 11: A Comprehensive Continuum of Gifted Education and Talent Development Services

Discovering, Developing, and Enhancing Young People's Gifts and Talents

Marcia Gentry
Purdue University

How would you determine if a child should play hockey? Would you give her the opportunity to put the skates on, spend some time on the ice, see if she likes hockey, develop her skills, work with a coach who can teach her about hockey and how to play it, and to see if (after all this enrichment in hockey) she has aptitude, talent, motivation, or passion for the game? Or would you measure her foot to see if the skate would fit and perhaps give her a test of her hockey knowledge before wasting precious ice time on her? Would you only be interested in her if she had previous hockey experience provided by parents with financial means?

What if you had a student who was a great swimmer, but not so good at hockey? Would you insist that he play hockey anyway because, after all, the program *is* a hockey program? Or would you refer him to the swimming coach for services? Would you put him in remedial hockey? Or would you encourage him to concentrate on swimming, his area of talent?

What Is a "Program"?

To determine whether having a program is sufficient one must first define what is meant by *program*. If by program one refers to the pullout program in the elementary school, or the afterschool enrichment program in the middle school, or the Advanced Placement program in the high school, or the hockey program, then certainly having a *program* is not sufficient. If, however, one refers to a comprehensive set

of responsive services spanning grade levels and subject areas, providing a variety of well-conceived opportunities to different students who have potential talent in many different domains, then such a program would not only be sufficient but could also serve as exemplar for others. In 1982, John Feldhusen referred to such a program as "differentiated programming" (p. 37), and he emphasized the need to focus on a wide array of gifts and talents found among students of diverse needs when developing appropriate services for them. Feldhusen's 1982 suggestions remain relevant to today's efforts to program for students with gifts and talents. Renzulli (1984) took this notion a step further when he suggested labeling the service rather than the child and using a revolving-door approach to identification.

Rather than simply identifying young people as gifted for placement in the "program," a variety of services must exist both to serve students whose strengths and talents are obvious and to develop strengths and talents among students whose talents remain hidden or undeveloped. This requires not only a continuum of services but also levels of services. In fact, the more services and the wider their variety, the more likely educators are to develop, recognize, and reach the talent and potential talents among the young people they are charged with educating.

Author's Note: Please address correspondence to Marcia Gentry, Purdue University, Beering Hall, Room 5116, 100 North University Street, West Lafayette, IN 47907-2098; e-mail: mgentry@purdue.edu.

Who Are Children and Youth With Gifts and Talents?

The following definition appeared in 1993 in the federal report *National Excellence: A Case for Developing America's Talent* and is consistent with the definition provided in the Javits Gifted and Talented Education Act:

Youth with outstanding talent perform or show the potential for performing at remarkably high levels of accomplishment when compared with others of their age, experience, or environment. These children and youth exhibit high performance capability in intellectual, creative, and/or artistic areas, possess an unusual leadership capacity, or excel in specific academic fields. . . . Outstanding talents are present in children and youth from all cultural groups, across all economic strata, and in all areas of human endeavor. (U.S. Department of Education, 1993, p. 3)

This definition results from many years of research into human abilities and potential, reflecting a broadened definition of giftedness and talent and underscoring the existence of talent among all groups of children and in all areas of learning. Scholars have long recognized the ambiguous and multifaceted nature of gifted, talented, and creative young people. Furthermore, many gifted adults went unrecognized as gifted by educators. Yet despite inclusive definitions and wide recognition of multiple areas of human talent, children of color and from poverty remain severely underrepresented in current gifted and talented "programs" across the country (see Ford, 1998; Wyner, Bridgeland, & DiIulio, n.d.; Yoon & Gentry, 2009). Furthermore, many "programs" still narrowly focus on general intellectual abilities, ignoring creative, artistic, leadership, specific academic, and other talents (National Association for Gifted Children, 2007).

A Comprehensive Continuum of Gifted Education and Talent Development Services

In 2001, the National Association for Gifted Children published annotated program standards, providing school personnel with guidelines for exemplary programs (Landrum, Callahan, & Shaklee, 2001). Essentially, these standards emphasized the importance of comprehensive, multifaceted programming to address a variety of student talents, complete with staff

development and evaluation components. To effectively program to meet the needs of students with identified gifts and talents and to develop gifts and talents among nonidentified, high-potential students requires a comprehensive continuum of differentiated services. However, this continuum must be flexible enough to be implemented in a wide variety of school settings, from small rural schools to charter schools, to specialized schools, to schools in urban areas. Not all services are possible or appropriate in all settings. However, to align services with an expanded notion of human talent, it is essential to offer a variety of services in multiple areas.

As services are developed and delivered, attention must be paid to the serious issue of underidentification, underrepresentation, and retention of students from culturally diverse and low-income families, who are often 5 to 10 times less likely than their White or Asian affluent peers to be identified as gifted and served in programs for gifted students (Ford, 1998; Yoon & Gentry, 2009). For example, according to a recent report, students living in poverty who score at the 75th percentile on a standardized assessment can be seen as equivalent to students from nonimpoverished families who score at the 95th percentile (Wyner et al., n.d.). If entrance to or screening for the gifted "program" requires a high standardized score, then children from low-income families will be overlooked. When educators identify and recognize the nature and extent of underrepresentation within their gifted and talented services, they can then take steps to develop and enrich students from underrepresented populations. By providing a range of services that can help students improve their skills and in which their talents can be recognized, a commitment to finding and developing talents among more children can be made.

Our own research on cluster grouping revealed benefits to all children in the school, documented increased student achievement (Gentry & Owen, 1999), and increased numbers of students from underrepresented populations identified as gifted (Gentry, 2008). Because the model calls for frequent identification without limits to the number of students served, its use helps develop talents among children and provides services to those who emerge in this process. We advocate integrating this model and others like it with a comprehensive K-12 continuum of services.

In 1994, Renzulli proposed such a continuum, and recently we updated and expanded it. In it we include direct services for gifted students *and* services designed to discover and develop talent among a

Table 1
A Comprehensive Continuum of Gifted Education and Talent Development Services^a

Elementary School	Middle School	High School
General Classroom Enrichment, Talents Unlimited, Junior Great Books	General Classroom Enrichment	General Classroom Enrichment
Discovery, Inquiry, Problem-Based Learning	Discovery, Inquiry, Problem-Based Learning	Discovery, Inquiry, Problem-Based Learning
Enrichment Clusters	Academies of Inquiry	Academies of Inquiry
Differentiation, Total School Cluster Grouping	Differentiation	Differentiation
Individual and Small Group Counseling	Individual and Small Group Counseling	Individual and Small Group Counseling
Social, Emotional, Physical Health	Social, Emotional, Physical Health	Social, Emotional, Physical Health
Career Awareness	Career Counseling	Career and Educational Counseling
Integrated Technology	Integrated Technology	Integrated Technology, Career and Technical Education Courses
Multicultural/Foreign Language Study	Multicultural/Foreign Language	Multicultural/Foreign Language
Independent Study in Interest Area	Independent Study in Interest Area	Independent Study in Interest Area
Arts Enrichment	Arts Enrichment	Arts Enrichment
Curriculum Compacting	Curriculum Compacting	Curriculum Compacting
Type III: Advanced Product/Service in Interest Area	Type III: Advanced Product/Service in Interest Area	Type III: Advanced Product/Service in Interest Area
Multii-age and Within-Class Grouping, Between Class Grouping by Skill Level	Within and Across Grade Level	Honors Courses
Cluster Grouping, Small Group Flexible Grouping and Differentiation, Achievement Grouping	Advanced/Honors Classes	Advanced Placement Courses
Advanced Enrichment in Leadership, Music, Visual, and Performing Arts	Small Group Flexible Grouping and Differentiation, Achievement Grouping	Advanced Options in Leadership, Music, Visual, and Performing Arts
Within and Across Grade Pullout by Targeted Ability, Subject, and Interest Areas	Advanced Options in Leadership, Music, Visual, and Performing Arts	Self-Designed Courses, Advanced Independent Study
Self-Contained Classes, (Single or Multigrade)	Resource Room Send-out to Facilitate Advanced, Student-Based Study	Advanced Options in Leadership, Music, Visual, and Performing Arts
Magnet Schools	Self-Contained Classes, (Single or Multigrade)	Self-Designed Courses, Advanced Independent Study
<i>Individual Options:</i> Internships, Apprenticeships, Mentorships, IEP, Dual Exceptionalities	Self-Contained Classes, (Single or Multigrade)	International Baccalaureate, Advanced Academies
<i>Acceleration Options:</i> Early Admission, Grade Skipping, Subject Acceleration, Dual Enrollment in Middle School Classes	Magnet Schools	Academies
	<i>Individual Options:</i> Internships, Apprenticeships, Mentorships, IEP, Dual Exceptionalities	Magnet Schools, Special Schools
	<i>Acceleration Options:</i> Grade Skipping, Subject Acceleration, Telescoping, Dual Enrollment in High School Classes	<i>Individual Options:</i> Internships, Apprenticeships, Mentorships, IEP, Dual Exceptionalities
		<i>Acceleration Options:</i> Subject Acceleration, Telescoping, Dual Enrollment in College Classes, Credit by Exam, Early College Entry
<i>Special Talent Programs:</i> Young Writers, Saturday and Summer Programs, Future Problem Solving, Math Olympiad, Science Olympiad, Math Leagues, Science Fairs, Talent Searches, Odyssey of the Mind, History Day, Geography Bee, First Robotics, Science Searches, Rube Goldberg Engineering, Lego League, Destination Imagination, Invention Convention, Youth in Government, Close up, Governors' Schools and Academies, and so on		

Source: Adapted, updated, and expanded from Renzulli (1994).

a. Services for all young people are highlighted in gray, and these options do not constitute gifted services but do set the stage for discovery and development of talent in more youth and children.

wider array of students at all levels. Table 1 depicts a comprehensive continuum of gifted education and talent development services, with services recommended for all students shaded in gray. We suggest that this continuum be viewed as an organizational guide, and services added as they are developed, identified, and studied. We encourage educators to recognize that the more services a comprehensive

program offers, the more likely that program is to address the diverse talents among its students. Implementing a variety of comprehensive services on the continuum can offer quality services to students with gifts and talents, help more students achieve at higher levels, and help educators recognize talent that, in the absence of deliberate enrichment services, may have gone unrecognized.

Final Words

To recognize whether talent exists there must be opportunities for talent to emerge. The little girl needs access to skates, ice, and high-quality instruction together with time to develop her talent and passion for hockey. Without it these things we will never know if she might be the next great player, no matter how sophisticated the skate measurement and no matter how comprehensive the knowledge assessment. When talent is recognized it must be nurtured. The boy needs to swim, hockey is not an appropriate program for him, and remedial hockey might take the time from him that he needs to become a great swimmer.

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Marcia Gentry directs the Gifted Education Resource Institute at Purdue University where she enjoys working with doctoral students and engaging in research and gifted education professional development. She remains active in the field through service to the National Association for Gifted Children and the American Educational Research Association and by writing, reviewing, and presenting research aimed to improve education for children, youth, and teachers.